**Headline:** The Courage of Care Coalition Helps Deconstruct Patterns of Domination and Oppression

**Teaser:** This “relational facilitator” training team explores the intersection of spirituality and justice work.

By Damon Orion

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**[Article Body:]**

Authoritarianism, white male supremacy, and [wealth supremacy](https://www.democracycollaborative.org/wealth-supremacy) are key catalysts for racial inequity, [wealth inequality](https://apps.urban.org/features/wealth-inequality-charts/), restrictions on reproductive rights, and many other problems of the modern era. With these values embedded in our culture, even well-meaning people can unintentionally propagate unhealthy attitudes and behaviors.

“I’ve been a part of seemingly amazing political movements that were trying to build [an] alternative and [found] it doesn’t take long before the same patterns of dysfunction and supremacy culture find their way in,” notes Brooke D. Lavelle, the co-founder and co-director of the [Courage of Care Coalition](https://courageofcare.org/). “I don’t mean that in a shaming way. It makes sense that if you’ve practiced one thing and you don’t have experience practicing or seeing [something else], it’s very hard to [break those patterns].”

Courage of Care uses a framework called [CourageRISE](https://vimeo.com/548370769) to build alternatives to this destructive mindset. Lavelle describes CourageRISE as “a model of helping us deconstruct patterns of domination and oppression that continue to perpetuate and drive so many of the crises of our time and reconstruct alternatives.”

Courage of Care nurtures “relational facilitators,” whom the group’s website [defines](https://courageofcare.org/relational-facilitators/) as “anyone called to develop the heartfelt and skillful capacity to strengthen solidarity, culture, and collective visions for freedom within our communities and movements for healing, justice, and liberation.” These facilitators include educators, activists, care workers, and DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) transformation workers in the corporate sector. Many of them [“work at the forefront of [the group’s]… racial, economic, climate, and land justice organizations and movements.”](https://www.eventbrite.com/o/courage-of-care-coalition-16038770960)

“Rather than adopting a stance of just fighting, resisting, or blocking the system, [CourageRISE] is also a framework and strategy to say we need to build skills to practice the alternative,” Lavelle explains. “The alternative won’t just come because we resist the status quo.”

Courage of Care [came together in 2016](https://courageofcare.org/). “At the time, many of us were working in spiritually grounded organizations for liberation and justice, primarily in North American Buddhist institutions. This was around the time interest was growing within those spiritual communities around doing diversity and justice work: What does that look like? What’s the marriage between spirituality and justice work? These are not new questions, but they were reaching a kind of intensity.”

Besides providing facilitator training, Courage of Care assists the healing and integration of its relational facilitators. The coalition offers these services to groups and individuals through workshops, training programs, courses, and retreats. “The program acknowledges the toll of care work on our relational tenders and that we, too, need spaces where we can show up fully in service of our own healing and integration,” the site [states](https://courageofcare.org/succulence-a-healing-and-integration-program-for-relational-facilitators/).

Lavelle explains that much of this group’s programming, training, and framework is geared toward identifying ways “to inscape or build in features of liberatory culture, loving care, counter-oppressive culture, rest, and healing and building muscles for [pluriversal](https://courageofcare.org/practicing-for-the-pluriverse/) practice, regeneration, and recalibration. We’re training folks to have an experience of that culture through our retreats and programs, but we also have a love for training facilitators in the art of that kind of work in their communities and organizations.”

Lavelle notes that Courage of Care uses humor, play, and cognitive dissonance work to help participants recognize and loosen the grip of problematic thinking patterns within themselves.

“With the [2024] U.S. election, even within the so-called movements of the left, there is a lack of connection and cohesion and a sense [that] ‘You’re with me or you’re against me,’” she says.

Farah Mahresi, an adviser for the racial justice-oriented organization [Donors of Color Network](https://www.donorsofcolor.org/), began working with Courage of Care by taking an introductory training workshop in 2023. She took their facilitators’ workshop later that year, and in 2024, she designed and co-facilitated a Courage of Care workshop called Sensing Alternatives.

Mahresi says a core part of Courage of Care’s model is “helping you explore different ways people interact with each other and what that looks like in times of tension, conflict, or fear. It helped me realize that I was showing up differently than I thought I was showing up. I hadn’t thought through [the idea that] changing the way I show up also influences the way someone else shows up. The simplest example is that if I showed up to a meeting ready to fight, that fight posture showed up in my tone of voice, how I was sitting, and more importantly, how I was holding tension within my body. I use that quite often; I’ll stop in a meeting and switch my posture in a way that welcomes people in.”

Courage of Care also works with [Forever Sabah](https://www.foreversabah.org/), a group in Borneo, Southeast Asia that is “supporting Sabah’s transition to a diversified, equitable, circular economy,” according to the organization’s [website](https://www.foreversabah.org/). Fiqah Roslan, partnership and learning experience facilitator at the [Forever Sabah Institute](https://www.foreversabahinstitute.org/) (FSI), explains that the organization works in four focal areas: food, agriculture, and fisheries; energy, infrastructure, and waste; livelihood, tourism, and enterprise; and forest, water, and soil.

Roslan says since this group began engaging with Courage of Care in 2022, “the frame of relationality has become integral to the work of Forever Sabah, as we approach relationships with the intention of affecting the shift from transactional to relational.”

Natasha Sim, communications and co-learning facilitator at FSI, notes, “Our [relational practice](https://www.foreversabahinstitute.org/2022-module/relational-facilitative-leadership) has supported a recalibration of the nature of our engagement with folks across projects and teams, whether in the field, the office, or cyberspace.”

Roslan adds that working with Courage of Care has brought “a deepened understanding of our colleagues’ diverse and often contrasting realities,” which include the experiences and perspectives of rice farmers, fisherfolk, wildlife rangers, climate researchers, administrators, and finance executives.